

A Lost Opportunity

by

Tudor
Jenks



MY BIOGRAPHER, if I should ever have any, would say in his first chapter: "From boyhood he evinced an aptitude for the Natural Sciences. He was seldom without a magnifying-glass in his pocket, and put it to most excellent use in familiarizing himself with those exquisite details of Mother Nature's handiwork which are sure to escape the mere casual observer." And in a later part of the same future rival to "Boswell's Johnson" will probably be seen these words: "In later life we see the traits of his boyhood deepened and broadened. The magnifying-glass of his school-boy days has become the large and costly binocular microscope surrounded by all the apparatus which the cunning workers in metals know so well how to produce in limitless profusion for the ruin of the scientific amateur."

If such statements should be made, they will be based upon facts.

There are, however, other facts which no biographer will dare to tell, and which, therefore, I must write for myself. The following experience is one of them. Whether to my credit or to my discredit, I shall tell the plain story and leave it, with all its improbability, to your fair judgment.

Already knowing my taste for the use of the microscope, you can understand the following letter without further introduction:

"AMAGANSETT, L. I., Aug. 5.

"DEAR PHILIP: I suppose the thermometers in the city are the only scientific instruments now studied with

any interest. Being cool enough here to be reasonably unselfish, I am willing to divert your mind from the thermometer to the microscope.

"I inclose what seems to my prosaic mind a pebble. It was picked up on the beach and playfully thrown by me at our 'Professor.' He, of course accidentally, caught it. After an examination, he declared that it differed from anything he had ever seen: that it was neither animal, vegetable, nor mineral. In short, he knows that he does n't know what it is, and therefore says (speaking in true scientific vein)—'Although of indeterminate nature, certain fusiform bosses, in conjunction with a general spheroidal tendency, seem strong *a priori* indications of aërolitic flight through our own atmosphere, or other gaseous medium of similar density'! I make no comments. So bring out your microscope and let us know what it is. If you should come and join us you would find little but sand and salt-water; but then there is plenty of each. Sincerely yours,

CARROLL MATHERS."

He inclosed a small rounded object wrapped in tissue-paper. It was light blue in color and a trifle smaller than a hazel-nut. The surface seemed, as the Professor hinted, to have been somewhat melted. It certainly had claims to be considered a curiosity.

That evening, after dinner, I took out my microscope, and after carefully cleaning the pebble, I examined the surface under a strong condenser, but thereby simply magnified the irregularities. "I shall have to cut it in two," I said to myself. It was very hard, and I succeeded only after some effort. I cut it through a little away from the center, and so divided it almost into halves. Ex-

aming the flat surfaces, I found a small dark spot in the center of one of them.

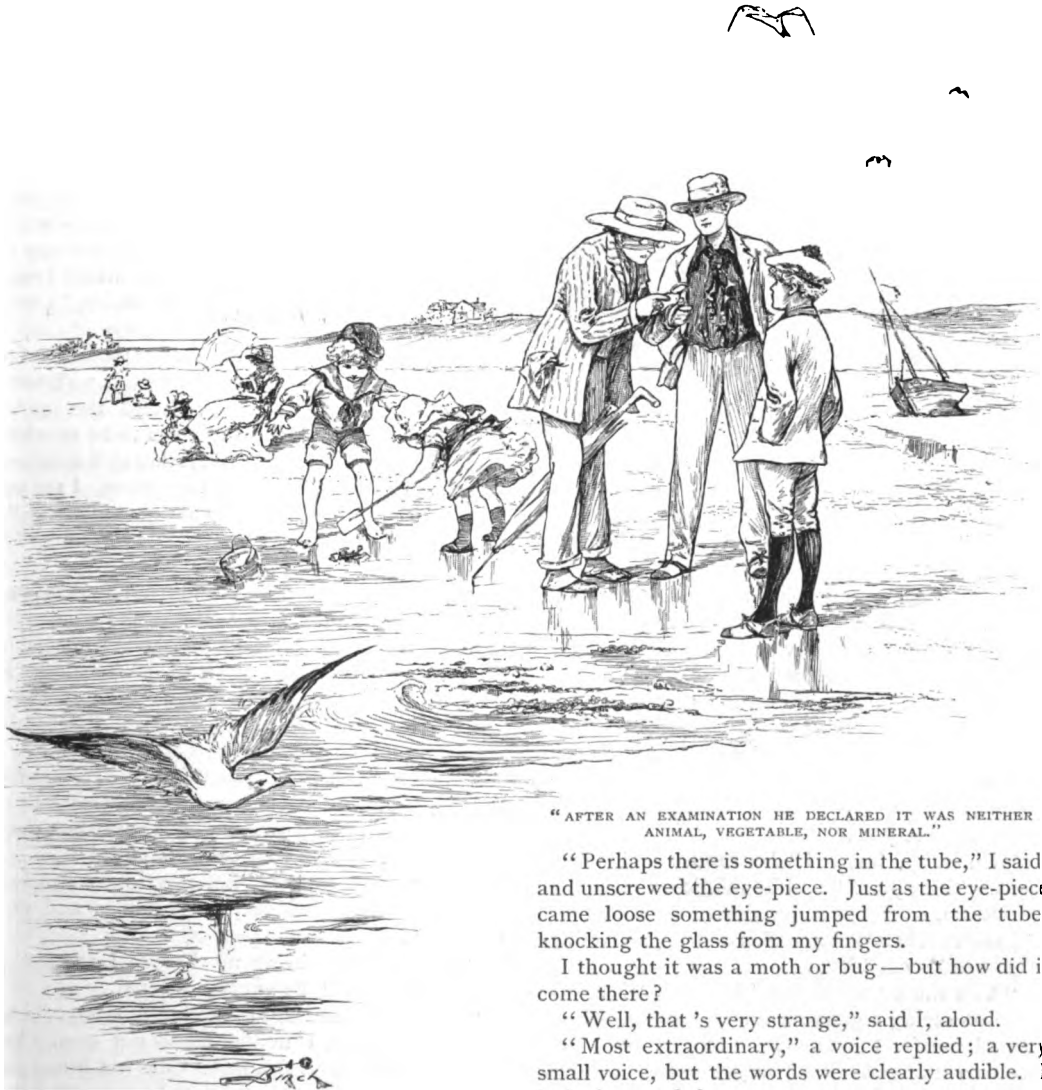
"I thought so!" I exclaimed triumphantly; "I will now cut off a section and shall undoubtedly find a petrified insect — perhaps of an extinct species!"

I sawed away the rounded side and, when I could see that the dark spot was nearer the surface, polished the section down with oil and emery-paper until I had obtained a thin disk with a dark spot in the middle.

itself and seemed about to assume the appearance of an insect — when, just at the point where I had expected it to be plainly visible, it suddenly disappeared, leaving a hole in the disk through which the light streamed! I was perplexed and gazed stupidly. The light seemed suddenly to flicker and then was shut off altogether.

I inspected the instrument carefully, but all seemed to be in perfect order.

I picked up the disk. There certainly was a hole through it.



"AFTER AN EXAMINATION HE DECLARED IT WAS NEITHER ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, NOR MINERAL."

"Perhaps there is something in the tube," I said, and unscrewed the eye-piece. Just as the eye-piece came loose something jumped from the tube, knocking the glass from my fingers.

I thought it was a moth or bug — but how did it come there?

"Well, that 's very strange," said I, aloud.

"Most extraordinary," a voice replied; a very small voice, but the words were clearly audible. I looked around the room.

"Don't trouble yourself to search. I am not afraid. I'm right here on the table!"

I faced the table again and discovered that what I

It was now ready for the microscope. The focus was carefully found by slowly turning the fine-adjustment screw. The spot gradually defined

had supposed to be a bug was, apparently, a man; and a very commonplace, quiet, and gentlemanly man, not at all remarkable, except for the fact that he was only about three inches tall. When I saw him he was straightening out his odd little hat, which had in some way become slightly crushed.

This seemed to mollify him, for he replied, with a smile, "It is a strange sensation to hear one's self styled a *lusus naturæ*, but I can not in justice complain, as I was about to apply the same term to yourself; and you certainly are colossally enormous — prodigious! I trust, however, that I have controlled my curiosity, and have accorded you such treatment as is due a gentleman — even on the very largest scale!"

He paused and gazed upon me with undisguised amazement.

"How did you get here?" I asked, after a moment's silence.

"I should be delighted to know," he answered, with evident sincerity. "It may be I can tell you, when you are good enough to begin by letting me know where I am."

"Nothing easier," I said. "This is my room."

"A valuable piece of information," he said, with some sarcasm, "and the apartment appears to be comfortable and rather well arranged — with exceptions. I see you cling to antiquated styles."

"Indeed! I was not aware of it."

"Why," he said, seeing I did not understand, "you light the room with coal-gas, as the ancients did. You still use the mechanical clock instead of the vocable chronophotometer; your furniture is, I see, of wood, instead of coherent alcyite, while — but I do not object to the effect — it is delightfully archaic in tone!"

"I really don't follow you," I replied, somewhat piqued, "but you might remember that, archaic or not, this room is my own, and your criticism upon it is as gratuitous as your presence in it!"

I admit that this was not precisely courteous, but his manner was very supercilious and provoked me.

"Why did you bring me here? I am sure I did n't request it," he angrily retorted.

"My atomic friend," I said, impressively, "who or what you are, I neither know nor care. But kindly bear in mind this fact: I did *not* bring you here. I don't ask you to stay here, — whenever you wish to go, I can bear your departure without a pang. Nevertheless, so long as you remain I shall expect you to behave in a gentlemanly man-

My eyes at times deceive me somewhat, as my microscope work has made them sensitive. So I stooped to take a closer view of my visitor.

He appeared to be startled, and cried:

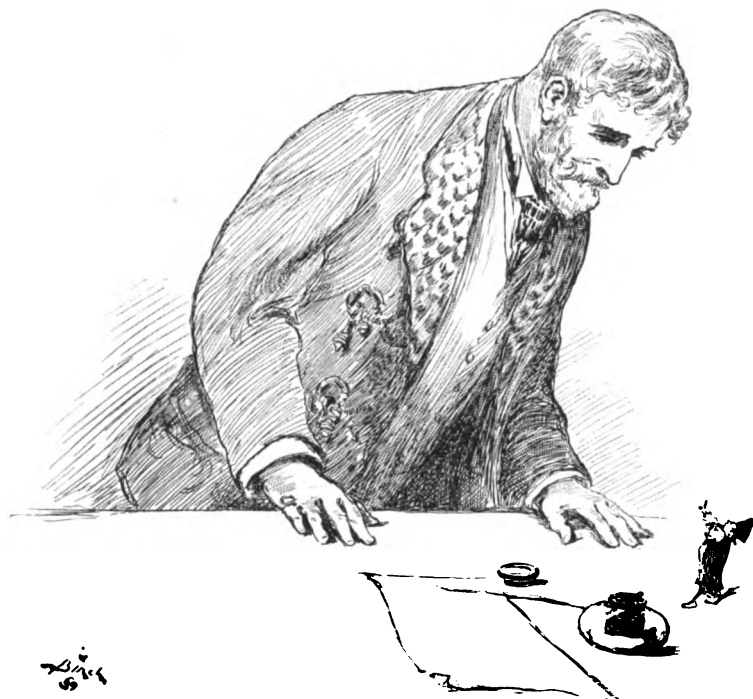
"Keep off! Do you mean to eat me? Beware! Giant though you be, I can defend myself!"

"Eat you!" I answered, laughing. "I am not a cannibal, even on a *very* small scale! And I have just dined. It was but curiosity. What in the world are you?"

"Curiosity, indeed!" he replied. "What in the world are *you*?" and he mimicked my tone to perfection.

I saw that he stood upon his dignity, and thought it best to humor him.

"You must pardon me," I began, "if my surprise on seeing a gentleman of your small presence caused me for the moment to forget the respect due to a stranger. But you yourself will not deny that the sight of such a mere atomy — a *lusus naturæ*, if I may be allowed the expression — would tend to excite curiosity rather than to remind one of the demands of courtesy."



ner!" Here I thumped upon the table, and he fell over. He recovered nimbly and, drawing himself up to his full three inches, replied with the greatest dignity:

"My colossal acquaintance, there is one fact you must kindly bear in *your* mind: Who or what you are is of little or no importance to me. How I came here, I know no more than yourself. Suffice it to say, I did n't come of my own accord; and, from my experience so far,"—here he paused and glanced scornfully about him,—“I have no desire to prolong my stay. But while I *do* stay I shall insist upon all proper courtesy and all due respect!"

His dignity was so absurdly out of keeping with his size that I could not refrain from a burst of laughter, and I became better-natured at once.

"Well," I replied, when I had recovered my composure, "now that we have come to an understanding, tell me quietly, in a friendly way, as one gentleman to another, something about yourself. If you will allow me the question, where do you live? Were you born a dwarf, or ——"

"Born a dwarf!" he broke in angrily, "born a dwarf! You great, coarse, overgrown giant—what do you mean, sir?"

"What do I mean?" It was too absurd. "You ridiculous diamond-edition of humanity, what do you suppose I mean? I have always heard that dwarfs were sensitive; but, really, when one is only about half the size of a respectable jack-knife ——"

"And I," he broke in again, "have always heard that giants were invariably thick-witted and rude; but I *did* suppose that any human being, even if he were as tall as the tallest trees and had a voice like a clap of thunder (which is far from agreeable to your hearers, by the way), might be sensible enough to ——"

"So you think," said I, interrupting him, "that I am as large as the tallest trees?"

"Certainly," he said, with perfect seriousness.

I thought it worth while to convince him of his error, and therefore invited him to step to the window, against which the table stood. He did so, and, upon looking out, threw up his arms in sheer amazement.

"It is a land of giants!" he said, slowly and in an awe-struck tone.

"Ah!" I remarked quietly, pleased with my little object-lesson, "you now see how much smaller you are than ordinary men."

"Ordinary men," he repeated very slowly and with an absent expression. "What then can he think me?"

He stood in silence, with his hands clasped behind him, and appeared to be deep in thought.

When he spoke again it was with an entire change of manner.

"Am I to understand you, sir, that all the men, women, and children known to you are proportionately as large as yourself, and that everything is on the same gigantic scale?"

"It is exactly so," I replied seriously.

"And may I ask you to believe that I have never seen anything or anybody except upon the smaller scale which you can see exemplified in me? Did you never see any one of my size before, nor hear of us?"

"Never! except in fairy stories," I said frankly, for now he seemed to be really a very sensible little man.

"This is not a question of fairy tales, nor of joking!" he said, with great solemnity. "We are in the very midst of some great mystery. I must belong to a different race of beings—for I never heard, read, or dreamed of such enormous people. Where I live, all are like myself!"

This seemed incredible, but finally I asked, "And where do you live?"

"I live," he answered, "in the twenty-first range of precinct forty, Telmer Municipal, Waver, Forolaria; and by profession I am an Official Arranger."

"You are very exact," I said, with mock admiration.

"And where do you live?" he inquired.

"This is my home," I said; "the Alfresco, Madison street, New York City."

"Thank you," said he, with sarcastic gratitude. "I am as wise as before!"

"You know as much of my residence as I of yours!" I answered sharply.

"You can not be ignorant of Telmer?" he asked, raising his eyebrows in surprise at my ignorance.

"You surely know New York City?" I rejoined, in the same manner. "The largest city in the United States!"

"United States," he repeated, "and what are those—who united them?"

"Perhaps a history would give you the clearest information," I suggested.

"I think it might, if I had the time," he replied soberly, as he drew from his pocket what I supposed to be a watch; but it was too small to be clearly distinguishable. He pressed it in his hand, and I heard a sound or voice clearly enunciating: "Thirty-four degrees after the eighteenth." Before I could say a word he resumed, "It is too late tonight; perhaps you will save my time by telling me the substance of it?"

"Flattered, I'm sure." I felt as if I was again in school; but after a moment's reflection I cleared my throat and began:

"The Kingdom of England ——"

"The what?" he asked, with a puzzled look.

"The Kingdom of England—where the English live ——"

"What are the English?"

"Oh, come," said I, laughing, "you are talking English! We are both talking English!"

"Well, well," he said; "I was thinking a while ago how it could be that you were able to speak good Forolarian," and he burst out laughing. Then suddenly ceasing he went on, "But if we begin on the mysteries we shall never get to the invited states. Pray go on."

"These English, you see, colonized a portion of America ——"

"A portion of America—that is the name of a place?"

"Oh, what is the use!" I broke off angrily. "If I define every word I use, I shall never reach a conclusion. If you would like to pursue the subject further, my library is at your service."

"Thank you," he replied, with dignity; "perhaps I could glean some information from *that* source." I made no reply.

Presently, seeing that he wandered about the table in rather an aimless way, I asked, "Can I be of service?"

"If you could suggest some method of reaching the floor ——"

I offered him the ruler. He seated himself cautiously upon it, and I lowered him gently to the floor.

"Quite a walk to the book-case!" was his next observation. I had n't thought of it, but proffered my services once more.

"A matter of indifference to me, sir," he replied, with a mite of a bow.

"Equally one to me," I replied, with a bow in return. I was resolved that he should do some thinking for himself.

"Let us say the lowest, then"; and he glanced at the upper shelves, perhaps calculating the possible result of a misstep.

I left him on the lowest shelf, returning to the table to put away the microscope. A slight cough drew my attention to the book-case.

"I admire the bindings," said the little fellow, as he paced to and fro along the shelf.

"I am gratified by your approval," was my indifferent reply.

"Particularly this one," he went on. "Let me see," he leaned far backward, and with much difficulty read the title: "'The Works of Shakespeare.'" I should like to read them."

"Very well," I answered politely.

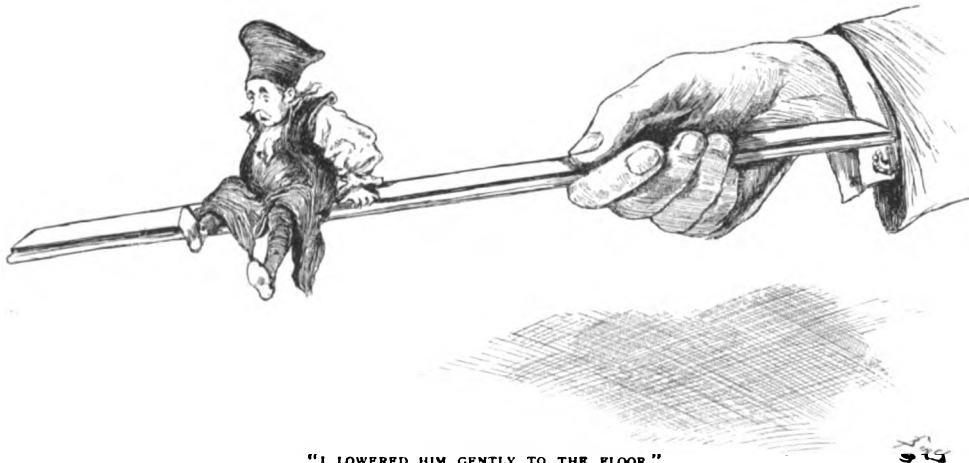
"Much obliged," said he fiercely. "Please lend me an electric derrick!"

"Pardon my stupidity—let me take it down for you." I stepped to the book-case, laid the book upon the floor, and returned to my work. A silence then ensued, which lasted so long that I looked up to see how he was progressing.

He was sitting on the shelf with his tiny legs hanging despairingly over a gulf of some six inches between himself and the floor. He was afraid to jump and ashamed to ask help. Catching my eye, he laughed and said:

"I am rather out of training just now, and not fond of jumping!"

"Say no more!" I lifted him to the floor, and



"I LOWERED HIM GENTLY TO THE FLOOR."

"Which shelf would you prefer?" I asked, as respectfully as possible, for certainly it was not an ordinary question.

turned away; but only to be recalled by a faint ejaculation. His mishaps were truly ingenious. He was caught beneath the cover of the book.

"My foot slipped," he explained with some confusion; "but if it had n't, I believe I could have opened the book all by myself!"

"I will not leave you, now, until everything is in proper order," I replied; for it occurred to me that to have any accident happen to him might be a very perplexing thing. Opening the book, I picked him up gingerly between my fingers, first asking pardon for the liberty, and deposited him softly upon the first page of "The Tempest."

"Are you all right now?" I inquired, to make sure.

"I believe so," said he, as he began to read — running to and fro upon the page. However, I sat down near by and watched him, fearing some new difficulty. He read with much interest, and seemed to enjoy it thoroughly, except when he came to the turning of a page. That was a nuisance indeed, as he had to turn up one edge, crawl over it, and then lift the page over.

"Have n't you a smaller edition of this fellow's writings?" he asked, somewhat exhausted by his efforts. "This is like reading sign-boards!"

"No," I replied shortly, "but if it tires you, you can read something else."

"But," said he, with some enthusiasm, "this is really quite good. It's equal to some of Wacoth's earlier and cruder work! It shows a talent that would well repay cultivation!"

"Yes, it *is* very fair," I replied, quietly; "Shakespeare certainly has produced some creditable plays — at least, we think so."

"I should like to have known him," went on my undisturbed visitor. "I think we would have been congenial. Don't you think so?"

I paid no attention to this. What could I say?

"We consider him one of the best writers in the language," I said, finally.

"I would like to hear about them," he said.

I pretended not to understand this hint: but he

waited very patiently and returned my gaze with quiet expectation.

"Now, look here," said I, calmly weighing my words, "I have, at present, other occupations

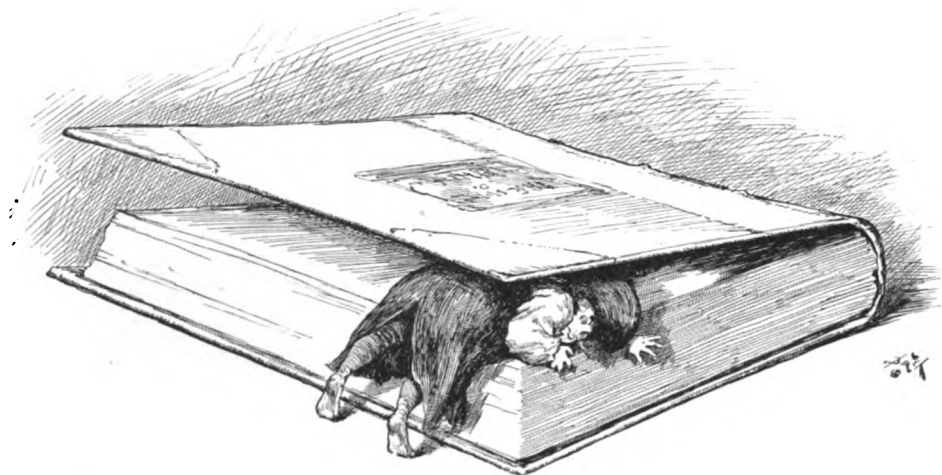


"I ADMIRE THE BINDINGS," SAID THE LITTLE FELLOW, AS HE PAVED TO AND FRO ALONG THE SHELF."

which, I regret to say, — this was sarcastic, — "prevent me from undertaking to give you a really thorough course in English literature. I might be more inclined to do so if I had something to begin on. Have you ever heard of Homer?"

"Yes," he answered eagerly, "my father has a cousin of that name — Homer Woggs!"

"I can not believe it is the same man," said I, soberly. He seemed much disappointed. "At all events," I went on, "you can not fail to see the folly of expecting me to explain to you all the events which have taken place since the world



"HE WAS CAUGHT BENEATH THE COVER OF THE BOOK."

began. I finished school some years ago, and have no desire to review the whole curriculum."

I turned resolutely away and left him to his own devices. I worked quietly for a few moments, only to be interrupted by a "Whew!"

"What's the matter now?" I asked, irritably.

"I'm tired of lugging over these pages!"

"Well, don't do it. Sit down. Repose."

"But I'm interested in the play!"

"I could, but I won't," I replied, rudely enough; but I was provoked at his impudence.

"You are very obliging," he said, sneeringly.

I made no reply. After a pause he made a suggestion.

"Although determined not to aid me to an occupation, perhaps you will not object to my sitting by and seeing what you are doing?"

I could not refuse so reasonable a request. I raised him to the table and gave him a paper-weight to sit upon.

He quietly watched me until I began to unscrew the glasses from my microscope, when he said carelessly: "I myself am a microscopic amateur!"

"It is an interesting subject," I replied.

"Yes. My success with the Mincroft glass was remarkable."

"The Mincroft glass, — I do not know it, — what is its nature?" I asked, with some natural curiosity.

"Why, the composite lens invented by Mincroft, which enables one to see the whole of a large object at

once, all parts being equally magnified — but I bore you?" He pretended to yawn.

"On the contrary," I said, eagerly, "it has



"HE PRETENDED TO YAWN."

"I'm not going to turn the pages for you."

"Could n't you read it aloud to me?" he asked, with cool assurance.

been my keenest desire to invent such an instrument. Pray describe it!"

"But it is *so* simple; any schoolboy can explain it to you," he said, with feigned indifference.

"But how can such a marvel be accomplished?" I insisted, carried away by curiosity.

"Do you really mean to say you never heard of it?" he inquired in a drawling tone, designed, I thought, to annoy me.

"Never! And I would give anything to understand it!"

He seemed amused by my eagerness, and, smiling indulgently, continued in the same tone, "Why, that is a trifle—a mere toy compared to the wonderful Angertort Tube. Now, that is what I should call an *invention*!"

"What! another discovery of which I have never heard? The Angertort Tube, did you say? When were these inventions made?"

"I believe it was during the third century, before the second great migration, but for exactness I shall have to refer you to the school-books. I never was good at dates. However, it does n't matter; these were but the first-fruits of the revival of science—when chemismication first superseded steam and electricity."

This was too much. "Steam and electricity superseded? They are yet in their infancy with us!"

"Oh," he replied, laughing, "you are far behind the times. We disused both as soon as we learned to control dynamic atomicity."

"You must be ages in advance of us. I beg you to explain some of these marvels to me."

"I have other occupations," said he, roguishly, "and, to my great regret, they will prevent my tutoring you in the A B C's of science. You must think me very obliging!" and he arose, put his hands in his trousers-pockets, and sauntered away across the table, whistling softly to himself.

I lost my temper.

"You cantankerous little midget, you will answer my questions or I'll send you back where you came from!"

He turned sharply upon me and exclaimed:

"You great hulking booby, do you expect me to bore myself by giving lessons in primary science to a cross-grained, disobliging fellow who will not

take the trouble to tell me who excited the states, who Shakespeare is, or to read me even one of his plays? No, sir! YOU KEEP YOUR SECRETS AND I'LL KEEP MINE. As to going back where I came from, I would be glad to rid you of my presence instantly—if only I knew how."

"I'll try it, anyhow!" I cried, so angry that I hardly knew what I said. "You came out of my microscope, and into it you shall go again!" I



caught him up, dropped him into the tube, screwed on the top, and was pleased to see the little black spot reappear in the disk. Opening the window, I threw out the disk and was amazed to see that, instead of falling, it floated away through the motionless air like a piece of thistle-down before a summer breeze. It soon left the area of light coming from my window and was lost to view.

"Aha!" I said, with deep satisfaction. "Now you can go back where you came from!"

I sat down beside my table and, as my anger cooled, began to think it all over. At first I felt great relief to be rid of the little pest, who fretted

me by his pertinacity and piqued my self-esteem by his air of superiority.

But gradually my temper cooled, and as I recovered my sane judgment I began to reflect that ordinary civility to the little manikin might have induced him to tell me enough to have secured me fame and fortune, or even to have made me a

benefactor to my whole race ; and I felt bitter shame that my ill humor and foolish pride had caused me pettishly to throw away an opportunity greater than had ever been granted to any human being.

Still, he was so provoking and so altogether irritating that I am inclined to think you yourself would have done very much the same.

THE LITTLE PINE-TREE.

From the German.

BY EUDORA S. BUMSTEAD.

ONCE a little Pine-tree,
In the forest ways,
Sadly sighed and murmured,
Thro' the summer days.
"I am clad in needles —
Hateful things!" — he cried;
"All the trees about me
Laugh in scornful pride.
Broad their leaves and fair to see;
Worthless needles cover me.

"Ah, could I have chosen,
Then, instead of these,
Shining leaves should crown me,
Shaming all the trees.
Broad as theirs and brighter,
Dazzling to behold;
All of gleaming silver —
Nay, of burnished gold.
Then the rest would weep and sigh;
None would be so fine as I."

Slept the little Pine-tree
When the night came down,
While the leaves he wished for
Budded on his crown.
All the forest wondered,
At the dawn, to see
What a golden fortune
Decked this little tree.
Then he sang and laughed aloud;
Glad was he and very proud.

Foolish little Pine-tree!
At the close of day,
Thro' the gloomy twilight,
Came a thief that way.
Soon the treasure vanished;
Sighed the Pine, "Alas!
Would that I had chosen
Leaves of crystal glass."
Long and bitterly he wept,
But with night again he slept.

Gladly in the dawning
Did he wake to find
That the gentle fairies
Had again been kind.
How his blazing crystals
Lit the morning air!
Never had the forest
Seen a sight so fair.
Then a driving storm did pass;
All his leaves were shattered glass.

Humbly said the Pine-tree,
"I have learned 't is best
Not to wish for fortunes
Fairer than the rest.
Glad were I, and thankful,
If I might be seen,
Like the trees about me,
Clad in tender green."
Once again he slumbered, sad;
Once again his wish he had.

Broad his leaves and fragrant,
Rich were they and fine,
Till a goat at noon-day
Halted there to dine.
Then her kids came skipping
Round the fated tree;
All his leaves could scarcely
Make a meal for three.
Every tender bud was nipt,
Every branch and twig was stript.

Then the wretched Pine-tree
Cried in deep despair,
"Would I had my needles;
They were green and fair.
Never would I change them,"
Sighed the little tree;
"Just as nature gave them
They were the best for me."
So he slept, and waked, and found
All his needles safe and sound!